



PATTERNS OF CONTACT AND COMMUNICATION: CONSTANTINOPLE AND ARMENIA, 860-976

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The eastern frontier of the Byzantine Empire in 860 bordered on the Islamic caliphate and stretched northeastward from Seleucia on the Mediterranean Sea across the Taurus and Anti-Taurus mountains to Trebizond on the Black Sea coast.¹ On the Arab side, a fortified borderland known as the *thughur* had developed from which frequent raids were launched into Byzantine Anatolia. The Byzantine response to such raids was defensive in character, seeking to limit the devastation and to ambush the raiders on their withdrawal rather than trying to prevent the attack in the first place.² The strategic advantage lay with the Arabs, as they could choose one or more invasion routes from their bases at Tarsus, Melitene, and Karin/Theodosiopolis.³ By contrast, the major Byzantine fortresses were located on the northern and western margins of the Anatolian plateau, protecting the fertile coastlands and Constantinople itself rather than the frontier region. This strategic imbalance denied the Byzantine Empire access to, and hence influence across, Armenia. The isolated district of Sper in the Upper Chorokh (Choroh) valley provided the only point of direct contact along this eastern frontier between

¹ For a recent history of the Byzantine eastern frontier in the ninth and tenth centuries, see Mark Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600-1025* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), pp. 310-57. For Byzantine interaction with Armenia, see Timothy W. Greenwood, "Armenian Neighbours (600-1045)," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c.500-1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 333-65.

² These tactics are set out in a Byzantine military treatise, titled "On Skirmishing Warfare or De Velitatione Bellica," in *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, trans. and ed. George T. Dennis (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1985), pp. 144-239.

³ Modern Erzerum or Erzurum.

the Byzantine Empire and territory held by an Armenian princely family. Even there, the Byzantine influence was intermittent.⁴ In the absence of consistent Byzantine intervention in Armenia, it is hardly surprising to discover that Armenian princes jostled among themselves for caliphal favor, with barely a glance towards Constantinople. From an Armenian perspective, Constantinople appeared remote, disengaged, and largely irrelevant, at best a refuge in the event of sustained attack.⁵ As recently as 838, prominent Bagratuni and Artsruni princes had participated in an Arab raid deep into Byzantine territory which had resulted in the sack of Amorion.⁶

The situation in 976 was radically different. The frontier had shifted significantly southeastward, running from the Syrian coast south of Antioch northwest to the Euphrates River, then north past the headwaters of the Murad Su (Eastern Euphrates) close to Lake Van and the sources of the Araxes to the east of Theodosiopolis and finally up to the mouth of the Chorokh River on the Black Sea coast. The thughur had been comprehensively dismantled, replaced by a network of small Byzantine administrative units known as themes.⁷ The Abbasid Caliphate had collapsed under internal political and religious stresses and the latest regional Arab power to challenge Byzantine supremacy in the east, the Hamdanid emirate of Aleppo, had been seen off in the previous

⁴ As recently as 850, Grigor Bagratuni, prince of Sper, had joined forces with the emir of Melitene and attacked the Byzantine Empire, although he rapidly changed sides when menaced by the caliph's Turkic general, Bugha al-Kabir. See René Grousset, *Histoire de l'Arménie des origines à 1071* (Paris: Payot, 1947), p. 366.

⁵ Shapuh Amatuni and his son Hamam are reported to have emigrated from Armenia in or around 791. See Ghevond, *Patmutiun Ghevondeay Metsi Vardapeti Hayots* [History of Ghevond, Great Vardapet of Armenia], ed. Karapet Ezian (St. Petersburg: I.N. Skorokhodov, 1887), pp. 168-69, trans. Zaven Arzoumanian, *History of Levond, the Eminent Vardapet of the Armenians* (Wynnewood, PA: St. Sahag and St. Mesrop Armenian Church, 1982), p. 149.

⁶ Josephus Genesius, *Regnum Libri Quattuor Iosephi Genesii*, ed. Anni Lesmüller-Werner and Hans Thurn (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978), p. 47, trans. Anthony Kaldellis, *Genesios, On the Reigns of the Emperors* (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1998), pp. 62-63; Theophanes Continuatus, *Chronographia*, ed. Immanuel Bekker (Bonn: E. Weber, 1838), pp. 126-31.

⁷ See Nicolas Oikonomidès, "L'organisation de la frontière orientale de Byzance aux X^e-XI^e siècles et le taktikon de l'Escorial," in *Actes du XIV^e Congrès international des études byzantines*, ed. Mihai Berza and Eugen Stansecu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1974), pp. 285-302.

decade.⁸ Byzantine military tactics were now geared towards offensive warfare.⁹ Most pertinently, Byzantium was now actively involved in expanding into Armenian districts, displacing the leading princes who received estates and imperial titles by way of exchange.

This essay will explore just one of these transformations along the eastern frontier in this period, namely the development of relations between successive emperors based in Constantinople and the Armenian elite. First impressions suggest that two phases may be distinguished. The first extended from 860 to approximately 920 and was characterized by seemingly limited contact between the parties, both in terms of scope and frequency. The second lasted from the accession of Romanos I Lecapenus (920-44) as emperor down to the death of John I Tzimiskes (969-76) and witnessed an expanded network of diplomatic contacts, with long-term significance for all concerned.

Of course, any periodization is a modern construct, imposed and hence artificial. These phases broadly correspond to the profile of the surviving sources and one should be wary about equating lack of evidence about direct contact with the absence of contact. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern a pattern in Byzantine dealings with individual Armenian princely houses, a progression, from first contact to final annexation of territory by way of concession, accompanied by the displacement and migration of the leading figures. Although the chronology and tempo of relations with Constantinople varied from family to family, the overall Byzantine strategy seems to have been remarkably consistent: attract, engage, and eventually absorb. Whether Byzantine expansion into Armenian-held territory had always been the intended outcome, or whether it came to be so, is hard to determine. However, it is undoubtedly the case that Byzantium fostered tensions within the Armenian noble houses and came to acquire future rights which enabled it to intervene at times of political stress, notably during contested successions. The period 860-976 witnessed the intrusion of Byzantium across western and central Armenia through the gradual acquisition of what

⁸ For a short introduction to the Hamdanids, see Hugh N. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (Harlow: Longman, 2004), pp. 265-82.

⁹ See Eric McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995).

may be termed "Armenian futures," that is rights which were activated and matured only after the death of the grantor. Since the first instance of Byzantine expansion into Armenian-held territory occurred after 920, the two-phase periodization, despite its flaws, will be retained.

Before examining the first phase, it may be useful to offer a brief overview of the principal sources. The four Armenian historical narratives will be familiar to many. The *History of the House of Artsrunik* by Thomas Artsruni records the deeds of the Artsruni princes of Vaspurakan, in southern Armenia.¹⁰ It originally extended to the year 904, and, although a continuator resumed the narrative, his account is focused upon the achievements of the first king of Vaspurakan, Gagik Artsruni, and does not refer to the Byzantine Empire.¹¹ The *History of the Armenians* by John Catholicos offers greater breadth in that it was not limited to one family; on the other hand, it has very little to offer in the way of information about Byzantine actions or ambitions, other than the exchanges of letters with the patriarch of Constantinople Nicholas I Mystikos.¹² It seems highly likely that the long-standing doctrinal tensions and suspicions between the two churches influenced the scope and content of his composition, which stretched as far as the autumn of 923. The *Universal History* of Stephen of Taron, on the other hand, dates from 1004 and covers the whole period under discussion. However, it offers a Spartan coverage of the first two-thirds of the tenth century, focusing predominantly on monastic foundations and Byzantine military successes against Arab-held fortresses in the thughur.¹³ Matthew

¹⁰ Thomas Artsruni, *Tovmayi Vardapeti Artsrunvoy Patmutiun Tann Artsruniats* [Thomas Vardapet's History of the House of Artsrunik], ed. Karapet Patkanian/Kerope Patkanov (St. Petersburg: I.N. Skorokhodov, 1887; repr. Tiflis, 1917, and Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1991), trans. Robert W. Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni: History of the House of Artsrunik* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985).

¹¹ Thomson, *House of Artsrunik*, pp. 15-17.

¹² John Catholicos [Hovhannes Katoghikos Draskhanakertsi], *Patmutiun Hayots* [History of the Armenians], ed. Mkrtich Hovsep Emin (Moscow, 1853; repr. Tiflis: N. Aghaniants, 1912, and Delmar NY: Caravan Books, 1980), pp. 265-84, trans. Krikor H. Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs Draxanakertc'i, History of Armenia* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1987), pp. 189-97.

¹³ The period from the accession of Smbat I in 891 to the death of Ashot III Bagratuni, his grandson, in 977, is covered in less than thirty pages of text. See [Stephen of Taron], *Stepannosi Taronetsvoy Patmutiun tiezerakan* [The Universal

of Edessa's *Chronicle* opens in the year 952 and supplies an intriguing but confused narrative of events, as one might expect from a twelfth-century author attempting to reconstruct the events of two hundred years earlier.¹⁴ While each of these sources has a contribution to make to this essay, their individual characteristics need to be appreciated. It is particularly frustrating that there are no contemporary Armenian historical narratives through which to study the greater Byzantine involvement in Armenian affairs in the second and third quarters of the tenth century and the local reactions to that involvement.

The principal Byzantine source through which to study these contacts is a diplomatic handbook, compiled in about 952 by Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (908-59) for his young son Romanos II (959-63), so that he might learn about the various regions, peoples, and princes with whom he would be dealing, their past relations with the empire, and imperial claims to sovereignty over them.¹⁵ This compendium of statecraft, the *De Administrando Imperio*, provides much valuable material about the diplomatic techniques employed on the eastern frontier. It includes a case study on how to develop and maintain contact with several branches of an Armenian princely family and, perhaps more surprisingly, an account of a diplomatic failure that almost jeopardized Byzantine interests to the north of Theodosiopolis.¹⁶ One of the striking features of this text is that it projects the emperor resident in Constantinople retaining personal respon-

History of Stephen of Taron], ed. Stepan Malkhasiants (St. Petersburg: I.N. Skorokhodov, 1885), pp. 159-87; trans. Frédéric Macler, *Etienne Asolik de Taron, Histoire universelle* (Paris: Imp. nationale, 1917), pp. 10-49.

¹⁴ Matthew of Edessa, *Patmutiun Matteosi Urhayetsvoy* [History of Matthew of Edessa] (Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1869), pp. 1-40, trans. Ara E. Dostourian, *Armenia and the Crusades Tenth to Twelfth Centuries: The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), pp. 19-36.

¹⁵ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gyula Moravcsik and trans. Romilly J.H. Jenkins (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967); Romilly J.H. Jenkins and Francis Dvornik, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio—Commentary* (London: Athlone Press, 1962). For an invaluable guide, see James Howard-Johnston, "The *De Administrando Imperio*: A Re-examination of the Text and a Re-evaluation of Its Evidence about the Rus," in *Le Centres proto-urbains russes entre Scandinavie, Byzance et Orient*, ed. Michel Kazanski, Anne Nercessian, and Constantin Zuckerman (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 2000), pp. 301-36.

¹⁶ *De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 43 and 46 respectively; Jenkins and Dvornik, *Commentary*, pp. 156-80; Howard-Johnston, "Re-examination," pp. 317-18, 326-27.

sibility for the conduct of diplomacy with neighboring states and peoples. Successive emperors are presented negotiating with Armenian princes, both indirectly through envoys and diplomatic correspondence and occasionally in person, when individuals were conveyed to Constantinople for a reception or other ceremony in the Great Palace. Emperors are also depicted concluding treaties, interpreting earlier agreements, even determining the precise location of the frontier.¹⁷ At one level, the degree of involvement in the operation of policy on the part of the emperor is not surprising, given the role that Constantine VII has in the composition of the text. But it may also be the case that Constantine was trying to emphasize to the youthful Romanos the need to take personal responsibility for future activities in this theater of the eastern frontier, negotiating directly with local Armenian elites, to ensure that the emperor was not sidelined or excluded altogether through the creation of local cross-border networks of power and authority under the private control of great magnate families such as the Skleroi or Phokades.¹⁸ In other words, the role of the emperor in Constantinople as arbiter of relations with the various noble Armenian houses may be more of a fiction than has been recognized hitherto, that the *De Administrando Imperio* is advocating greater imperial engagement along the eastern frontier rather than simply recording it.

Infrequent Contact, 860-920

Traditionally the year 863 has been heralded as a decisive moment on the eastern frontier, when the tide turned and the era of Byzantine advance began. It was in this year that the emir of Melitene and his forces were intercepted and annihilated, that the head of the Tarsus raiding party was surprised and killed, and that the leader of the Paulicians, a religious sect fiercely antagonistic toward the Byzantines, died. Yet on closer inspection, it is difficult to detect any sustained attempt to reverse the balance of power. The series of long-distance raids initiated under Emperor Basil I (867-86) brought few long-term benefits. After a disas-

¹⁷ See *De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 45.

¹⁸ For the great families, see Jean-Claude Cheynet, *The Byzantine Aristocracy and Its Military Function* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), articles 1, 3, 8.

trous attack on Tarsus in 883, it appears that the imperial government decided to close down the eastern frontier, at least as far as offensive operations were concerned. There are several possible explanations for this, not least of which was "the gravitational pull of events in the Islamic world" identified by Mark Whittow, who noted that Byzantine gains tended to coincide with periods of internal crisis within the Abbasid Caliphate.¹⁹ The converse was also true, that the temporary Abbasid revival in the late ninth century coincided with Byzantine quiescence along the eastern frontier. In 883, the Zanj rebellion was finally quashed while Ibn Tulun, the fractious governor of Egypt, died in 884. Under the campaigning caliph, al-Mu'tadid (892-902) and his son al-Muktafi (902-08), the Abbasid regime recovered much of its authority, and this was largely maintained under al-Muqtadir (908-32) until the mid-920s, when significant Qaramita raiding began again.²⁰ It cannot be merely coincidental that Byzantine activities along the eastern frontier revived in the middle of this decade.

Byzantine actions in the east should also be interpreted in the context of Byzantine relations with the emergent Christian Bulgar state. Emperor Leo VI and his immediate successors were compelled to afford priority to the Balkan theater of operations.²¹ The proximity of the Bulgar state to Constantinople, its appeal to the local elites as an alternative source of legitimization and power and, eventually, the imperial pretensions of the Bulgar leader Symeon, all contributed to this redirecting of attention away from the east. It was, however, two catastrophic Byzantine defeats, at Bulgarophygon outside Adrianople in 896 and at Achelous in 917 which determined that the Bulgar threat had to be countered before any sustained initiatives could be undertaken in the east.

From the perspective of the leading Armenian princes, namely Ashot Bagratuni, prince of princes (862-84) and ultimately king (884-890), his son and successor Smbat (890-914), and the several Artsruni princes of Vaspurakan, the second half of the ninth

¹⁹ Whittow, *Byzantium*, p. 329.

²⁰ See Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, pp. 177-85.

²¹ For a recent study, see James Howard-Johnston, "A short piece of narrative history: war and diplomacy in the Balkans 921/2-spring 924," in *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization in Honour of Sir Stephen Runciman*, ed. Elizabeth M. Jeffreys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 340-60.

century was characterized by spasmodic and seemingly ephemeral contact with Constantinople. For them, the principal arbiter of power remained the caliph exercising control through his designated deputy, although the increasingly independent Sadjid emirs of Adharbaydjan (south-southeast of Armenia), Afshin and then Yusuf, strongly influenced Armenia between 890 and 925. Without exception, Armenian princes looked to them first, rather than to the Byzantine emperor, for recognition and support. Thus, for example, in 891, it was only after Smbat had received a crown from the caliph via Afshin that he contacted Emperor Leo VI (886-912).²² Smbat justified his conduct to an irritated Afshin on the grounds that such contact enabled him to obtain valuable vestments and other ornaments by way of diplomatic exchange for transmission on to the caliph or Afshin himself. Whether or not this was the case, the very fact that John Catholicos reports about Smbat justifying his behavior reveals a good deal about Smbat's own political priorities. As noted, when reading the two main Armenian historical sources for this period, it is striking how little the Byzantine Empire seems to impinge upon the lives of the principal Armenian princes. Rather, it is the Sadjid emirs who intervened in Armenian affairs and with whom Armenian princes entered into agreements. As late as 926, the continuator to Thomas Artsruni records that King Gagik Artsruni of Vaspurakan was temporarily entrusted with responsibility for the countries of Armenia and Georgia by the Sadjid emir Yusuf when the latter was summoned southwards to defend Iraq from attack by the Qaramita.²³

This is not to argue that Byzantium was entirely excluded. After Ashot I Bagratuni had been crowned king on August 26, 884, the emperor Basil I acknowledged him as his "beloved son," and Leo VI addressed Smbat I Bagratuni in similar terms. In 892, Smbat even sent prisoners who had been captured at Dvin to Leo, although this seems to have been Smbat's own campaign rather than a joint-operation.²⁴ The *History* of John Catholicos contains a

²² Regarding the crown, see John Catholicos, *Patmutiun*, pp. 146-47; Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs*, p. 132. For contact with Leo VI, see John Catholicos, *Patmutiun*, p. 158; Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs*, pp. 137-38.

²³ Thomas Artsruni, *Patmutiun Tann Artsruniats*, p. 289; Thomson, *House of Artsruni*, p. 351.

²⁴ John Catholicos, *Patmutiun*, pp. 160-61; Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs*, pp. 138-39.

well-known exchange of letters between Patriarch Nicholas I of Constantinople and John Catholicos in the immediate aftermath of Yusuf's execution of Smbat Bagratuni in 914, following which Smbat's son, Ashot II Erkat (Iron, 915-28/29), traveled to Constantinople to seek support.²⁵ But if anything, these letters seem to confirm the irregular nature of such contact. Nicholas wrote that he was at a great distance from John, hardly indicative of close relations.²⁶

It is also telling that Nicholas refers back to the endeavors of the patriarch Photius in pursuit of ecclesiastical harmony with the Armenian Church which had broken off over thirty years before; this suggests a lack of meaningful communications on this issue in the intervening period.²⁷ Although he referred several times to the *curopalate*—by whom he meant the curopalate of Iberia, Atrnerseh—and the leader of Abasgia, Nicholas did not mention any Armenian prince by name, whether Bagratuni, Artsruni, or other. This again implies a degree of separation. Moreover whereas three of Nicholas' extant letters were addressed to the leader (*exousiastes*) of Abasgia and one to the most renowned curopalate of Iberia, none of his letters before 924 were written to Armenian princes.²⁸

For his part, John Catholicos was keen to stress the relationship between Ashot and the young emperor Constantine VII, but this very emphasis suggests a revival of contact rather than continuity. Moreover, Ashot's flight to Constantinople and subsequent return at the head of an army falls squarely within a familiar expression of contact, according to which the empire was treated as the last refuge of a fugitive prince.²⁹ This was the only concrete support that Ashot received from the empire. In the remainder of his *History*, John Catholicos depicts Ashot desperate-

²⁵ John Catholicos, *Patmutiun*, pp. 265-84; Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs*, pp. 189-97.

²⁶ John Catholicos, *Patmutiun*, p. 266; Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs*, p. 190.

²⁷ See Igor Dorfman-Lazarev, *Arméniens et byzantins à l'époque de Photius: Deux débats théologiques après le triomphe de l'orthodoxie* (Louvain: Peeters, 2004); Timothy W. Greenwood, "Failure of a Mission? Photius and the Armenian Church," *Le Muséon* 119:1-2 (2006): 123-67.

²⁸ Nicholas I Mystikos, *Letters*, trans. Romilly J.H. Jenkins and Leendert G. Westerink (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1973), nos. 46, 51, 162 (to the *exousiastes* of Abasgia), and no. 91 (to the *curopalate*).

²⁹ John Catholicos, *Patmutiun*, pp. 284-86, 292-93; Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs*, pp. 197-98, 201-02.

ly trying to establish himself in various parts of his father's former domains, with only limited success. This lack of Byzantine support should probably be linked to the Byzantine disaster at Achelous in August 917. Nevertheless, when the newly-appointed Byzantine commander John Kourkuas attacked Dvin in 922, he found that it was held by none other than Ashot II who mounted a vigorous and successful defense on behalf of Nasr al-Subuki, the caliph's deputy in Armenia.³⁰

If there were only the Armenian sources from which to reconstruct relations between Byzantium and Armenia in the period 860-920, the resulting impression would be one of infrequent and superficial contact. Chapter 43 of the *De Administrando Imperio* supplies an important corrective. It records that Leo VI sought to attract several members of the princely family of Taron into relationship with Byzantium through the distribution of honors and presents.³¹ Arguably the targeting of Taron as the focus of attention was very deliberate. Taron was the most westerly region of Armenia under direct Armenian control and hence closest to the Byzantine frontier.³² Moreover, as John Catholicos describes, Taron was briefly the focus of armed hostilities at the very end of the ninth century, when succession problems within the princely family prompted the intervention of neighboring Armenian princes and local emirs.³³

Leo VI attempted to exploit this instability, pressing the new prince Grigor to travel to Constantinople. Grigor rebuffed the invitation but permitted first his illegitimate son Ashot and then his brother Apoganem to attend upon the emperor. Both were honored with imperial rank, lavishly entertained, and then returned. Evidently, this was a confidence-building exercise, designed to allay Grigor's suspicions while at the same time demonstrating the material and honorific rewards he could expect. This initiative was helped by the consistent use of the same imperial agent, a *basilikos protospatharios* named Constantine Lips, first to

³⁰ Stepannos Taronetsvoy *Patmutiun tiezerakan*, p. 170; Macler, *Etienne Asolik*, pp. 24-25.

³¹ *De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 43; Jenkins and Dvornik, *Commentary*, pp. 156-64.

³² Karen N. Yuzbashyan, "L'administration byzantine en Arménie aux X^e-XI^e siècles," *Revue des études arméniennes* n.s., 10 (1973-74): 140-44.

³³ John Catholicos, *Patmutiun*, pp. 174-77; Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs*, pp. 145-47.

make contact and then to ferry each of the figures to and from the capital.

Finally, Grigor himself was persuaded to attend the emperor. He was appointed to the high imperial rank of *magistros* and to the office of *strategos* of Taron, although the latter seems to have been little more than a ceremonial post to enable the prince to be paid an annual stipend of ten pounds of gold and ten pounds of *miliaresia* (silver coins). There is no evidence that he ever fought for the Byzantine army, raised forces, or paid anything resembling taxation or tribute.³⁴ Since a *magistros* of Taron was present at a court reception in Constantinople on January 1, 900, it seems that this diplomatic activity occurred in the immediate aftermath of the hostilities, when Grigor was still establishing himself.³⁵ He was also given the house of Barbaros in Constantinople to use as a residence during this visit and thereafter, anticipating that he would be making further visits. Soon after his brother Apoganem made a second visit and was given the same house of Barbaros, together with an advantageous marriage to the daughter of Constantine Lips.³⁶ Unfortunately for Byzantine hopes, Grigor died just days after his return to Taron in unknown but undeniably suspicious circumstances. The double grant of the same property in Constantinople had significant repercussions later on.

Chapter 43 therefore confirms that conspicuous efforts were made to attract various members of the princely family of Taron into the sphere of Byzantine influence at the very end of the ninth century. It is not clear, however, whether or to what extent the relationship between Constantinople and the princes of Taron continued after that time, nor indeed how effective it was, at least from a Byzantine perspective. There are several comments at the start of the chapter noting the unreliability of the prince of Taron.³⁷ These suggest that Grigor judged it advisable to maintain good relations with the neighboring Arab Shaybanid emir in northern

³⁴ It is possible that his elevation to this office may be associated with the creation of the *theme* of Mesopotamia, between 899 and 901, and the appointment of Manuel of Tekis as its first *strategos*.

³⁵ *De Ceremoniis*, Bk I, ch. 24, p. 139, line 18.

³⁶ *De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 43, lines 72-88.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, lines 7-26: "while in word he pretended to esteem the friendship of the emperor, in fact he acted at the pleasure of the chief prince of the Saracens . . . he was found . . . to prefer the cause of the Saracens."

Syria in preference to the emperor, echoing the stance of Gagik Artsuni toward the Sadjid emir Yusuf. What is unclear, however, is whether the frustration over the perfidious conduct of Grigor, prince of Taron, reflects attitudes from the time of Leo VI, when the first dossiers were put together, or whether it echoes the view of the compiler, Constantine VII, looking back over Grigor's checkered career in imperial service.

Regular Contact, 920-976

If the first phase was characterized by limited diplomatic contact between Constantinople and Armenia, the years after 920 seem to have witnessed an expansion in the scope and frequency of these contacts. This second period also saw the maturing of "Armenian futures," that is, what happened when the future interests and rights promised to the Byzantine emperor by an Armenian prince in return for present recognition or support finally crystallized. Frustratingly, the contemporary Armenian historical narratives record almost nothing of this more active phase of Byzantine policy in the east or Armenian perceptions of it. Instead, it is necessary to rely on Greek and Arabic sources in order to study the Armenian elite and their relations with Constantinople during this fifty-year period. This discussion will focus on two Byzantine texts before turning to consider one Arabic geographical survey that supplies a salutary corrective. Deep within a vast and rambling compendium known as the *De Ceremoniis*, a compilation also attributed to the emperor Constantine VII, there is a list of protocols or letter-headings to be used on imperial correspondence when writing to foreigners.³⁸ It seems highly likely that it dates from the 920s. Table 1 presents the relevant extracts:

Table 1
***De Ceremoniis*, Book II, Chapter 48**

To the Prince of Princes of Greater Armenia. A three-solidus chrysobull. Constantine and Romanos, Autokratores, Augusti,

³⁸ *De Ceremoniis*, Bk II, ch. 48, pp. 687-88. For a thorough study of Chapter 48, see Bernadette Martin-Hisard, "Constantinople et les Archontes du Monde Caucasiens dans le Livre des Cérémonies, II, 48," in *Travaux et Mémoires*, ed. Gilbert Dagron (Paris: de Boccard, 2000), pp. 357-594.

great Emperors of the Romans, whose faith is in Christ who is God, to X, most famed Leader of Greater Armenia and our Spiritual Son.

To the Prince of Aspurakan or Vasparakan, who now is honored Prince of Princes. A three-solidus chrysobull. Constantine and Romanos, Autokratores, Augusti, Emperors of the Romans, whose faith is in Christ who is God, to X, most famed Prince of Princes.

To the Prince of Kokovit, Armenia; to the Prince of Taro, Armenia; to the Prince of Moex, Armenia; to the Prince of Auzan, Armenia; to the Prince of Sune, Armenia; to the Prince of Vaitzor, Armenia; to the Prince of Chatziene. Armenia; to the 3 princes of the Servotioi, who are called Black Children. Protocol for all those listed above. Command from the Christ-loving despots, to X Prince of Y.

To the Catholicos of Armenia, to the Catholicos of Iberia, to the Catholicos of Albania. Protocol to the 3 Catholicoi. Command from the Christ-loving despots to X most-pious leader of Y.

Several important propositions emerge from this list. The first two protocols attest direct correspondence between the emperor and the principal Bagratuni and Artsruni princes. Evidently there had been a change in designation: the prince of Vaspurakan is described as "now" honored as prince of princes. It is known that the prince in question, Gagik Artsruni, held this rank by 925 because there is a single letter from the Patriarch of Constantinople Nicholas I to the "prince of princes" on the occasion of the death of the Catholicos of Armenia.³⁹ This must refer to John Catholicos, who died while under the protection of Gagik in either 924 or 925. Intriguingly, therefore, Gagik was elevated to the rank of prince of princes some four years before the death of Ashot II Erkat in 929. This change reflects the supremacy enjoyed by Gagik Artsruni until his death in 943/44, as well as the temporary eclipse in Bagratuni fortunes. This diminution in Bagratuni power can be traced back to the final years of Smbat I Bagratuni and his ignominious death, but it persisted during the era of Ashot II Erkat and his brother and successor Abas I Bagratuni (929-53). The travails of John Catholicos in the last years of his life, shuttling between several princes in search of per-

³⁹ Nicholas, *Letters*, no. 139. For a different interpretation of the identity of the recipient, see Martin-Hisard, "Archontes du Monde Caucasiens," pp. 423-25.

sonal security, may be taken as indicative of the rapid changes in the balance of power within Armenia. Evidently, John became disillusioned with the ability of Ashot II to protect him, transferring first to latter's cousin and rival, Ashot lord of Bagaran, the so-called anti-king, and then to Gagik Artsruni.⁴⁰ It is not clear whether Gagik's promotion in rank involved the simultaneous demotion of Ashot II. The headings are slightly different, notably in respect of the epithet "spiritual son" which is withheld from Gagik. Significantly the *De Administrando Imperio* titles Abas not as prince of princes but rather as magistros.⁴¹ This downgrading is corroborated in a letter composed between 929 and 936 by the imperial secretary Theodore Daphnopates, who also distinguished the prince of princes Gagik from the magistros Abas.⁴² Whether or not Ashot was himself demoted during his lifetime, it is clear that his successor held a lesser title.

The earliest instance of contact between an Artsruni prince and the Byzantine emperor in the tenth century emerges from Chapter 43 of the *De Administrando Imperio*.⁴³ Gagik, prince of Vaspurakan, together with Atrnerseh, curopalate of Iberia, and Ashot, prince of princes, all complained to Emperor Romanos I Lecapenus about the *roga* or salary being paid to Grigor, prince of Taron, arguing that he did nothing more than they did in the service of the empire.⁴⁴ As the curopalate died in 923, this complaint must date from between 920 and 923. Bernadette Martin-Hisard has argued persuasively for 922, associating the complaint with a Byzantine attack on Dvin in that year.⁴⁵ The letter from Patriarch Nicholas I to Gagik in 925 represents the earliest extant correspondence with the prince of Vaspurakan. On this occasion as well, it was Gagik who initiated the exchange, with the aim of securing the succession of his candidate as Catholicos of Armenia by means of a ceremony in Constantinople. The letter is

⁴⁰ John Catholicos, *Patmutiun*, pp. 357-58; Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs*, p. 232.

⁴¹ *De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 44, line 9.

⁴² Theodore Daphnopates, *Correspondance Théodore Daphnopatès*, ed. and trans. Jean Darrouzès and Leendert G. Westerink (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1978), Letter 4, lines 42-43: *Kakikion archonta ton archonton*; line 57: *to te Kakikio kai to magistro Apasekio*.

⁴³ *De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 43, lines 109-14.

⁴⁴ This is indirect evidence for the nominal nature of the title of strategos of Taron that Grigor had previously been granted.

⁴⁵ Martin-Hisard, "Archontes du Monde Caucasicn," pp. 393-94.

Nicholas' reply to that inquiry. Nicholas was not afraid to raise the divisive issue of doctrinal difference, maintaining that not only would Gagik's candidate have to be instructed accurately in doctrine and ecclesiastical order but also that Gagik himself should be attached to "our Christ-loving Emperor and to our most holy Church of God by the confession of faith and in the spirit of correct doctrine."⁴⁶ At the same time, Nicholas referred to the "confession of friendship" by which Gagik was "attached to our Christ-loving Emperor and to our most holy church of God." Although the patriarch was uncompromising in his defense of orthodox belief as he understood it, clearly it was possible to adhere to other doctrinal positions and yet still enjoy a relationship of friendship with the emperor.⁴⁷

Returning to the protocols, the list in *De Ceremoniis* defines no fewer than seven other Armenian princes with whom the emperors Constantine and Romanos were in direct communication. These are described by reference to individual regions or districts in Armenia—specifically Kogovit, Taron, Mokka, Vayots Dzor, Andzevatsik, Siunik, and Khachen—and not in terms of princely house, imperial title, or through ties with other noble families. They comprise middle-ranking figures who rarely feature in the Armenian historical record, and then only in terms of their relationship with one of the leading Bagratuni or Artsruni princes. Yet their presence on this list indicates that the emperors thought it worthwhile to develop a direct relationship with each of them, independently of any influence that might be brought to bear by virtue of their ties with the leading princes. The Armenian historical tradition tends to view the tenth century predominantly in terms of the leading figures, and even then Bagratuni in preference to Artsruni. This list suggests that the principal figures were far more reliant on the support of a network of lords functioning at the level of the district

⁴⁶ Nicholas, *Letters*, no. 139, lines 43-46.

⁴⁷ This was not the end of the matter. A letter purportedly from "Gagik of Vaspurakan, king of Armenia, to the Emperor of the Greeks Romanos" has survived in the *Book of Letters*. Its tone is conciliatory. The author considers himself as a "servant to you, holy and elevated archbishop, patriarch and heir of the Apostles and to you, holy king who preserves the tradition of the heir of the throne of Christ, since we in this country of Armenia, maintained obedience to your imperial throne and to your patriarchal succession, as the books of historians attest." See *Girk tghlots* [Book of Letters], ed. Hovsep Izmirians (Tiflis: T. Ravtiniants and M. Sharadze, 1901), p. 295.

than the Armenian historical tradition imparts. Despite the re-emergence of the title of "king" in Armenia in 884, the exercise of power still depended to a large extent on the allegiance of local lords and their armed forces.⁴⁸ The appearance of these figures in this list suggests that the emperor appreciated their significance.

It is noteworthy that the list includes the prince of Taron, at this time the same figure, Grigor, with whom Leo VI had previously developed ties. Just as Leo VI also met Grigor's brother and illegitimate son, so, too, did Romanos I Lecapenus encourage contacts with both the sons and the nephews of Grigor, and profited from their rivalries. Although the breadth of this list of protocols is impressive, covering the leading figures of nine different princely houses, it does not express the imperial down-reach within each of those families. For that, Chapter 43 of the *De Administrando Imperio* confirms simultaneous contact with other family members. Collectively the list identifies the principal Armenian princes with whom the emperor was in contact; it does not reflect the true number of Armenian nobles whom Romanos I sought to attract into relationship.

The list refers separately to the Catholicoses of Armenia, Iberia, and Albania, implying individual correspondence with each of them. Again, there are no surviving letters addressed to or received from them. Another letter, however, composed by Theodore Daphnopates indicates a direct contact with the bishop of Siunik in about 933. This is the first surviving piece of correspondence between Constantinople and Siunik in the tenth century, although it refers to two earlier communications.⁴⁹ Theodore severely reprimanded the bishop of Siunik for teaching that Christ had only one nature and hence contrary to the doctrinal position of

⁴⁸ For the coronation of Ashot I Bagratuni on August 26, 884 as "King of the Ashkenazians," that is, King of Greater Armenia, see John Catholicos, *Patmutiun*, pp. 138-40; Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs*, pp. 128-29, 272-73.

⁴⁹ Theodore Daphnopates, *Correspondance*, Letter 10, pp. 108-41. The start of the letter traces the recent exchange of correspondence, referring to an imperial ordinance on the issue of correct belief sent to the bishop of Siunik and his reply rejecting the emperor's statements. Theodore mentions that the letter from the bishop of Siunik had needed to be translated from Armenian into Greek, thereby confirming that the imperial administration was able to accommodate communications in other languages. Theodore's letter closes by commanding the bishop to read and show it to laymen, monks, and priests in the country of the Armenians, implying that the issue of heterodox belief was not confined to Siunik.

the Greek Church which, following the Council of Chalcedon, maintained two natures. This pressure from Constantinople may have had an impact because some fourteen years later, in 947, the Armenian Catholicos Anania Mokatsi undertook a vigorous defense of the anti-Chalcedonian position in the course of which he was compelled to discipline the metropolitan bishop of Siunik for his pro-Chalcedonian sympathies.⁵⁰ The presence of a pro-Chalcedonian party within Siunik is supported by the temporary elevation of Vahan, metropolitan of Siunik, to the rank of Catholicos of Armenia after Anania's death in 967, from where he was expelled because of "the love and agreement" with the Chalcedonians expressed in his letters. It is intriguing to observe that for all his energy in defending the Armenian doctrinal position, even to the extent of countenancing a second baptism for those who had already received baptism in the Chalcedonian tradition, Anania Mokatsi was succeeded, albeit briefly, by someone who professed diametrically opposite views.⁵¹ This suggests that there was substantial support for both confessions across the regions of Armenia. Following his deposition by a synod convened at Ani, Catholicos Vahan I Siunetsi sought refuge with King Apusahl-Hamazasp of Vaspurakan, Gagik's son. This may have reflected the fulfillment of the hopes expressed by Patriarch Nicholas I some forty years earlier that Gagik acknowledge his doctrinal error. The Arstruni association with Byzantine orthodoxy is striking and contrasts with consistent Bagratuni antipathy.

In order to study the subsequent development of the ties between Constantinople and the Armenian elite and the circumstances in which future legal rights were realized, it is necessary to return to the *De Administrando Imperio*. Chapter 43 traces the progress and outcome of the diplomatic contacts between the emperor and various members of the princely house of Taron across two generations. In 923, Prince Grigor of Taron asked Romanos to exchange his interest in the house given him in Constantinople for an estate in Keltzene, a district within the empire. Grigor

⁵⁰ Jean-Pierre Mahé, "L'Eglise arménienne de 611 à 1066," in *Histoire du Christianisme des origines à nos jours*, vol. 4: *Évêques, Moines et Empereurs 610-1064*, ed. Gilbert Dagron, Pierre Riché, and André Vauchez (Paris: Desclée, 1993), pp. 507-10; Martin-Hisard, "Archontes du Monde Caucasien," p. 405.

⁵¹ *Stepannosi Taronetsvoy Patmutiun tiezerakan*, pp. 178-79, 181; Macler, *Etienne Asotik*, pp. 36, 41.

even requested a specific property, one that had recently been sequestered following Bardas Boilas' failed revolt earlier that year.⁵² Evidently, Grigor was very well-informed about recent events inside the empire, to the extent of knowing which estates were available for redistribution. In the end, he was awarded another estate, but this affair antagonized his nephew, Tornikios, the son of Apoganem, who claimed in a letter that his own inherited rights in respect of that house in Constantinople had been violated. Later on, after the death of Grigor, Tornikios returned to this subject, pleading that if he was not entitled to either the original house or the replacement property, both should revert to Emperor Romanos to prevent Tornikios' cousins from getting their hands on them.

This second generation of princes in Taron seems to have been very quick to appeal to the emperor to protect their respective positions, offering major concessions in return. Grigor's elder son Bagarat devised in a will that any children born of his marriage to the sister of a high-ranking official in Constantinople would inherit his entire country; in return, he secured an interest in the same estate in Keltzene, though only for the lifetime of his wife. Grigor's nephew Tornikios went even further, offering his country to the emperor in return for safe-conduct of himself and his family to Constantinople because of the oppression he was experiencing at the hands of his cousins. By the time an imperial agent arrived in Taron to take up the offer, Tornikios was dead, having left a will in similar terms to the proposal he had made when alive.⁵³ One is left with the distinct impression that Bagarat and Tornikios were competing with one another for imperial favor.

The climax of Chapter 43 is very significant.⁵⁴ Although entitled to the whole territory of Tornikios under the terms of his will, Romanos I listened to the arguments of Tornikios' cousins, Bagarat and Ashot, who maintained that they would be unable to live if he occupied that country as his own. They offered to concede a fortress called Oulnoutin and its surrounding land in exchange for the territory of their cousin. It seems highly likely that Tornikios had inherited lands in eastern Taron, while his cousins

⁵² *De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 43, lines 89-95. The property that Grigor requested had previously belonged to one of the rebels named Tatzates.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, lines 135-63, 166-77.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, lines 171-86.

had taken over western Taron. If Romanos were to occupy eastern Taron, Bagarat and Ashot would be effectively cut off from the rest of Armenia and hence "unable to live." Romanos I agreed to their request. Perhaps the most interesting feature of this very involved chapter is that Romanos did not insist on what he was legally entitled to but accepted a compromise. Nevertheless, an important fortress had been secured, a successful outcome from which, one assumes, Emperor Constantine VII intended that his fourteen year old son should learn. This chapter was not intended to provide a complete history of Taron. Instead it was designed to show to the future Emperor Romanos II the importance of developing relations with several members of the same princely family over generations. It was, after all, impossible to second-guess who would emerge as the leading prince in any power-struggle, whether for succession within the family or for survival in violent competition with neighboring houses. It was therefore important to back several figures simultaneously, being careful to secure from each of them rights or interests in return with which to intervene or negotiate in the future.

This essay includes only a cursory discussion of two of the four chapters in the *De Administrando Imperio* which comment most directly upon Armenian affairs. As discussed, Chapter 43 contemplates Byzantine contact and then intervention in the complicated circumstances of the princely house of Taron. Chapter 44 records the succession of Kaysid emirs in Manzikert, a small emirate established to the north of Lake Van. Chapter 45 describes Byzantine operations around the major fortified center of Theodosiopolis, and the challenges of negotiating with local Georgian notables. Finally, Chapter 46 records a failed Byzantine attempt to take control of the commercially vibrant town of Ardanudj, north of Theodosiopolis.

These four chapters are not primarily prosopographical or biographical in focus, despite the plethora of names recorded and the tortuous family situations that are touched upon. Rather, there is a legalistic quality to each of them, concentrating on who enjoyed possession and control of land in each of the theaters, how the dispositions changed over time, and on what basis the emperor could lay claim to sovereignty or ownership of particular fortresses or cities. An important distinction is drawn between what was legally correct, that is, what territory the emperor could legit-

imately claim was his, and what was practicable, that is, what was politically possible.⁵⁵ This is shown clearly in Chapter 43. Although Tornikios made Romanos I the sole heir of all his territory, Romanos heeded the appeals of the sons of Grigor and exchanged his rights for other territory.

Chapter 46 serves as a cautionary example from the recent past, of the dangers of pursuing legal rights without paying sufficient attention to the political realities or consequences. The chapter reports that in 923 Romanos I Lecapenus was unexpectedly offered possession of a key Georgian fortress and thriving commercial center called Ardanudj, well beyond the immediate frontier.⁵⁶ He took steps to secure its occupation by Byzantine troops, smuggling them across the intervening territory under the guise of an embassy. When the Byzantine annexation of Ardanudj came to light, however, two of the princes who controlled territory adjacent to Ardanudj threatened to transfer allegiance to the Arabs and campaign with the armies of "Persia," the contemporary term for the Sadjid emirate of Adharbaydjan. Romanos hastily backed down, denying all responsibility, withdrawing his forces, and publicly berating his envoy for exceeding his orders.⁵⁷ This placated the princes. In fact, as the chapter makes plain, the envoy was simply following the verbal orders he had received from Romanos. Significantly, this failure did not have a detrimental effect on the envoy's subsequent career under Romanos, indicating that he retained the emperor's confidence. This chastening experience seems to have deterred Romanos from making any further attempts at outright annexation of territory then under Armenian or Georgian control, even if these were of strategic importance and even if he was invited by the prince then in possession, unless it bordered on the empire, as Oulnoutin evidently did. The fact that this final dossier reports a failure after three discrete chapters reporting Byzantine success is most probably not accidental. It was included by Constantine VII as a salutary reminder to the youthful Romanos about the perils of overstretch in a politically fragmented and fluid region.

⁵⁵ A similar argument is developed by Jonathan Shepard, "Constantine VII, Caucasian Openings and the Road to Aleppo," in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, ed. Antony Eastmond (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 25-28.

⁵⁶ *De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 46, lines 57-62.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, lines 64-93, 128-48.

It can be seen therefore that a degree of pragmatism colored Byzantine policy toward the Armenian elite in this period. Direct military action against either an Armenian or Georgian prince was ruled out. Armed intervention in support of an individual prince had been shown to be of very limited value. When Zoe's regency council had been unable or unwilling to support Ashot II Erkat Bagratuni consistently after 914, he had turned elsewhere for assistance.⁵⁸ Instead, successive emperors sought to engage with as many of the leading figures in each princely house as possible, drawing them into relationship. The outstanding question is: to what purpose? What were Byzantine intentions towards the Armenian elite? This issue of Byzantine motivation along this sector of the eastern frontier is difficult to answer with any degree of confidence. The slow rate of territorial expansion lends some support to the view that Byzantium did not set out to absorb Armenian-held territory, that the empire merely sought to neutralize potential threats and avoid antagonizing Armenian and Georgian princes. On the other hand it is unpersuasive to deduce Byzantine policy solely on the basis of what happened.

To this end, there is value in returning once more to the opening words of Chapter 43, when Constantine VII addresses his son directly.

"It is right that you should not be ignorant of the parts towards the rising sun, for what reasons they became once more subject to the Romans, after they had first fallen away from their control."⁵⁹ Tellingly, there is no differentiation between Arab-held and Armenian-held territory. If these chapters are exemplary and if they reflect the particular interest of Constantine VII, then it seems that he had greater ambitions in the east than has perhaps been acknowledged, ambitions that included the annexation of Armenian territory. And in response to the question "why," again the opening lines of this chapter offer a possible answer. These describe the character and conduct of Grigor in singularly unflattering terms. Grigor was found to be unreliable, "double-faced," revealing future plans to the caliph whilst at the same time appear-

⁵⁸ John Catholicos, *Patmutiun*, p. 321; Maksoudian, *Yovhannēs*, pp. 22, 215, where Ashot obtained recognition and military support from Constantine III of Abasgia.

⁵⁹ *De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 43, lines 4-6.

ing to be a loyal Byzantine client.⁶⁰ These sentences represent the only substantial biographical passage in these chapters, projecting a particular image of an Armenian prince. Constantine seems to be proposing that all Armenian princes were like this, soliciting favors from both caliph and emperor.

From a Byzantine perspective, given the utter untrustworthiness of the Armenian notables as clients, territorial acquisition was the only alternative. It seems clear that by 952, the date of compilation of the *De Administrando Imperio*, this had become Byzantine policy. It is therefore not surprising to read in the *Universal History* of Stephen of Taron that in 966 the Romans took control of Taron after the death of Ashot.⁶¹ The late eleventh-century Byzantine historian Skylitzes records the same event slightly differently, recording that two brothers, Gregory and Pankratios, ceded their country of Taron to the emperor Nikephoros Phokas in exchange for the titles of *patrikios* and rich, income-generating lands.⁶² Skylitzes implies that this concession was suggested by the brothers, but when viewed in the context of the earlier acquisition of rights and claims to territory by testamentary disposition, it appears more likely that this had been negotiated previously by Ashot, namely, that at his death his territory should revert to the emperor.

Although this episode marks the conclusion of Byzantine engagement with an independent Taron, a relationship that had extended across at least three generations, it is important to remember that not every Armenian princely house was at the same stage in terms of its relationship with Byzantium. Each relationship will have developed in different ways and at its own tempo. The agreement of 974 between Emperor John Tzimiskes and King Ashot III Bagratuni (952-77), as described by Matthew of Edessa, contained a promise of friendship, by which the emperor probably guaranteed not to advance beyond his borders, in return

⁶⁰ Ibid., lines 7-26.

⁶¹ *Stepannosi Taronetsvoy Patmutiun tiezerakan*, p. 183; Macler, *Etienne Asolik*, p. 44.

⁶² Skylitzes, *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis historiarum*, ed. Hans Thurn (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1973), p. 279, trans. and comm. Bernard Flusin and Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Jean Skylitzès Empereurs de Constantinople* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 2003), pp. 234-35.

for Ashot's supply of men and supplies.⁶³ There is no evidence to suggest that at this stage Tzimisces acquired, or was looking for, any other rights or claims to intervene in Ashot's kingdom, either immediately or in the future. Such rights were only finally obtained half a century later, when Hovhannes-Smbat III Bagratuni conceded them to Basil II in 1022. The terms of this agreement stipulated that Ani would revert to Byzantium at the death of Hovhannes-Smbat.⁶⁴

There is one final perspective through which to study the relationship between Constantinople and Armenia, namely in terms of the payment of tribute or taxation. In his description of Armenia, Adharbaydjan, and Arran, the Arab geographer Ibn Hawqal records ten figures who were tributaries of the Sallarid emir Marzuban ibn Muhammad in 955. Four of them were clearly Armenian:

Abul-Qasim Ali ibn Jafar [the vazir of Marzuban] imposed on . . . Abul-Qasim al-Wayzuri, lord of Wayzur, 50,000 dinars plus offerings . . . he imposed on the descendants of al-Dayrani to pay according to the previously agreed (sum), 100,000 dirhems yearly, but exempted them from the payment for four years in recognition of their having yielded up to him Daysam ibn Shadhluva, who had sought their protection but whom they then handed over treacherously. He imposed on the descendants of Sunbat with regard to their districts of Armenia Interior, 2,000,000 dirhems but afterwards remitted 200,000 dirhems for compassionate reasons. He imposed on Sennacharib lord of Khadjin 100,000 dirhems, plus offerings and horses to the value of 50,000 dirhems.⁶⁵

Following Vladimir Minorsky, Wayzur is the Arabic form of Vayots Dzor, a separate principality in Siunik. The Banu Dayrani

⁶³ Matthew of Edessa, *Patmutiun*, pp. 20-21; Dostourian, *Crusades*, pp. 27-28.

⁶⁴ Greenwood, "Armenian Neighbours," pp. 360-61.

⁶⁵ Ibn Hawqal, *Opus geographicum*, ed. Johannes H. Kramers (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1938), pp. 354-55, trans. Vladimir F. Minorsky, "Caucasica IV," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 15 (1953): 519-20. This translation was checked against the Arabic by Andrew Marsham of the University of Edinburgh, whose valuable assistance I gratefully acknowledge. The text specifies dinars rather than dirhems in respect of Vayots Dzor but this looks like a copyist's error. Vayots Dzor is a small mountainous district, and it seems inconceivable that it would be liable for the gold equivalent of 1,500,000 dirhems, an amount in the order of the sum levied on the whole of the Bagratuni lands.

represents the line of Derenik Artsruni, the father of Gagik I Artsruni of Vaspurakan, prince of princes. Likewise the Banu Sunbat comprises the descendants of King Smbat I Bagratuni. Finally, the list refers to Sennacharib or Senekerim, prince of Khachen. One striking feature of this group is that they all appeared in the list of protocols found in the *De Ceremoniis*.

Aside from the striking absence of any ethnic or religious differentiation within the list between Armenian, Albanian, Kurdish, and Arab princes, or the relative amounts levied upon them, several observations should be made. In the first place, the document proves that in 955 Armenian princes were liable for the payment of, considerable sums to an Arab emir of Adharbaydjan. This occurred at a time when Byzantine attention was centered on meeting the military challenge of the Hamdanid emir Sayf al-Dawla of Aleppo and reducing the Arab fortresses in the Taurus and Anti-Taurus, west and south of Armenia. In spite of the pattern of contact and communication with Constantinople outlined above, the emergence of Marzuban ibn Muhammad after 942 prompted most Armenian princes, including the leading Bagratuni and Artsruni families, to pay or at least to agree to pay, tribute. Conversely, there is no evidence to suggest that the emperor ever attempted to levy taxes or extract tribute from Armenian princes, at least while they were in possession of their ancestral lands. Indeed, it is striking that the only persons in the *De Administrando Imperio* who were recorded as paying tribute to the emperor were the three Kaysid emirs of Manzikert, Abu Sawada, Abul Aswad, and Abu Salim, and they were forced to pay only after the raids against them by John Kourkuas in 928 and 931.⁶⁶ While developing ties with Constantinople, even the most prominent Armenian princes continued to be mindful of the threat posed by powerful Arab emirs based in Adharbaydjan and the Djazira. Successive Sadjid emirs exerted influence over a thirty-year period (890-925), and the fate of King Smbat I Bagratuni was not easily forgotten by Armenian princes. This helps to explain the swift submission by several Armenian princes, including king Gagik I

⁶⁶ *De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 44, lines 33-34, 44-45, 58-60, 63-65, 85-91, 110-12. For these campaigns of Kourkuas, see Ibn al-Atir, in Alexandre A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2, pt. 2: *Extraits des sources arabes*, trans. Marius Canard (Brussels: Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales, 1950), pp. 151-53; *Stepannosi Taronetsvoy Patmutiun tiezerakan*, pp. 169-70; Macler, *Etienne Asolik*, pp. 24-25.

Artsruni, to the Hamdanid Sayf al-Dawla in 940.⁶⁷ In the rapidly changing world of Transcaucasia in the tenth century, these princes could not know that Sayf al-Dawla would come under increasing military pressure from the Byzantine Empire and that his dominance of Armenia would be short-lived. Theirs was a decision made on the basis of the contemporary situation and recent experience. It is all too easy to interpret these events with the benefit of hindsight and fail to appreciate the genuine apprehension generated within Armenia by the emergence of emirs like Sayf al-Dawla or Marzuban ibn Muhammad. Although the latter did not impinge directly upon Byzantine ambitions in the east, this does not mean that Marzuban was not a considerable, if ephemeral, figure in Armenia in the middle of the tenth century.

Marzuban died in 957, only two years after the date attached to this list of tributaries, and his successors failed to maintain his political ascendancy. Marzuban's death marked the end of the tribute system articulated by Ibn Hawqal. Whether or not the Bagratuni kings had ever paid the stipulated 2 million dirhems in full or part, after 957 the tax receipts and duties through which this tribute had been collected for onward transmission were now available to Ashot III for expenditure within Armenia. It cannot be coincidental that this period witnessed significant building activity within the kingdom, enabling Ashot III to move his capital from Kars to Ani in 961. Moreover, one may conjecture that it was the control of these resources which enabled the Bagratuni kings of Ani to remain aloof from Byzantium for so long, immune to the attractions of wealth and status within the Byzantine Empire. The extraordinary growth of Ani in the second half of the tenth century must reflect an economic boom, one that the Bagratuni kings were in prime position to exploit. Their steadfast resistance to Byzantine blandishments should be related to their control of the commercial center of Ani.

Conclusions

This essay set out to explore the pattern of contact and communication between Constantinople and the Armenian elite between

⁶⁷ Ibn al-Azrak, in Vasiliev, *Byzance*, vol. 2, pt. 2, p. 115; Ibn Zafir, in Vasiliev, *Byzance*, vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 122-23; Whittow, *Byzantium*, pp. 319-20.

860 and 976. Relations were initiated with a range of figures from each princely house, although the surviving sources reveal this only when studied collectively. Moreover the guiding hand behind the single richest source, the *De Administrando Imperio*, namely Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, shaped his selection of Caucasian material very carefully, stressing to his young son Romanos that he needed to engage directly with the Armenian and Georgian elites and that their loyalty could not be relied upon. In this, Constantine VII was proved to be prescient, as Armenian forces were to play significant roles in the service of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas in the civil wars that characterized the first years of his grandson, Basil II.⁶⁸ Indeed one could make a strong case that it was Basil II who heeded his grandfather's advice, persisting with a strategy of obtaining "Armenian futures" which matured at times of greatest political stress, that is times of succession, and presented an opportunity for direct and ostensibly legitimate intervention.

One final issue must be considered. Was this strategy, of territorial annexation and imperial expansion, intended from the outset? Such a notion underpinned the thinking of Emperor Constantine VII in 952, when he penned the introduction to Chapter 43. It was also at play in Taron, when Tornikios named the emperor as the main beneficiary in the event of his death, in return for safe-conduct for his wife and child. The date of Tornikios' death is not securely established; some have argued for 939 as the year when Oulnoutin was transferred into imperial possession although one can make a case for a slightly earlier date in the 930s.⁶⁹ Chapter 46 of the *De Administrando Imperio*, however, contains an earlier voluntary concession of territory to the emperor, for Ashot Kiskasis offered to give his city of Ardanudj to the emperor Romanos I in 923, although it is not clear what he expected or hoped to obtain in exchange. Although this affair ended in failure, the very fact that such a concession of territory could be anticipated by an oppressed local lord suggests that such practices may not have been unprecedented. At the very least, it pushes the earliest date for Byzantine territorial ambitions back to 923, but it is conceivable

⁶⁸ See Catherine Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 311-13, 450-61.

⁶⁹ Howard-Johnston, "Re-examination," p. 326n78, in favor of the 939 date.

that such ambitions may have been germinating before this. One feature is clear: Byzantium was content to play a very long game when it came to annexing Armenian-held territory.



Ivory of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus Being
Crowned by Christ, 10th Century (Echmiadzin Treasury, now
Pushkin Museum, Moscow)